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Three Letters of Maharani Jind Kaur

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The story of the incarceration of Maharani Jind Kaur (popularly known as *Mai Jindan*), the mother of Maharaja Duleep Singh, in the fort of Lahore, her removal from there to the fort of Sheikhpura as a state prisoner and her ultimate banishment from the Punjab is very tragic. But it has become all the more tragic and painful by the discovery of three of her letters, that form the subject of this paper. These letters were purchased by me in October 1940 from Pandit Kirpa Ram, grandson of the late Rai Sahib Pandit Wazir Chand Trikha of Jhang for the Khalsa College, Amritsar, and are preserved there in the collection of the Sikh History Research Department. One of these letters is in Maharani's own handwriting while the other two are transliteration of the originals, rendered into Persian characters by Herbert B. Edwardes, whose initials (H.B.E.) are inscribed thereon. One of them bears the initials (J.L.) of John Lawrence.

The first letter was written on, or a day or two after, 14 August 1847, when it was decided by the British Resident at Lahore, Colonel Henry Lawrence, that 'the Maharani is to confine herself to the Summan [Burj]' in the fort of Lahore and that some of her old servants were to be dismissed and replaced by those chosen by the government.

Ever since the arrival of the British in the Punjab after the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845–46, there had been a clash of interests. On the one side there were the political agents of the East India Company who wished to establish themselves permanently in the Punjab. They had got a foothold in the country and they did not want to go back. In fact, they had their eyes far beyond the Sikh frontiers to the northwest. On the other side was the Queen-mother, Maharani Jind Kaur, who had initially been in favour of the retention of the British troops, under the terms of the Treaties of the 9 and 11 March 1846: 'the British

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Government will not exercise any interference in the internal administration of the Lahore State—but in all cases or questions which may be referred to the British Government, the Governor-General will give the aid of his advice for the further of the interests of the Lahore Government' (Aitchison 1892: vol. IX, no. XVI, 42). But she had been disillusioned to find that in the course of their nine months' stay in the country the British had won over, by liberal grants and promises of *jagirs*, high offices, titles and other favours of most of the leading chiefs of the state and had so placated them in their own favour as to turn their backs upon the interests of the Lahore state and to petition to the British government to tighten the British hold upon the Punjab. Maharani Jind Kaur stoutly opposed the Treaty of Bharowal (16 December 1846) that placed the administration of the Punjab entirely in the hands of the British Resident with 'full authority to direct and control all matters in every department of the State' (Singh 1940: 96, article 2 of the Treaty).

Maharani Jind Kaur wished to save the Punjab from the clutches of the British government. In the words of Henry Lawrence to the government, 17 December 1846—a day after the Treaty of Bharowal—'During the last day or two, her whole energies have been devoted to an endeavour to win over the Sardars of high and low order and to unite them all together in a scheme of independent government of which she herself was to be the head.' But this was successfully foiled by Frederick Currie with the help of councillors like Tej Singh—a non-Punjabi¹ commander-in-chief of the Sikh forces—who had played to the tune of the British in 1845–46 and had brought about the defeat of the Lahore army.

The Treaty of Bharowal, 16 December 1846, made the British Resident at Lahore an absolute and sole dictator in the Punjab. The Governor-General Sir Henry Hardinge, was very particular about reducing Maharani Jind Kaur to a nonentity. He had, therefore, written to Currie on 7 December 1846, that 'in any agreement made for continuing the occupation of Lahore, her deprivation of power is an indispensable condition' (Singh 1940: 92–93). And it was with this object in view that he had further suggested in the same letter,

If the Sardars and influential chiefs, and especially the Attareewala family, urge the British Government to be guardian of the Maharaja during his minority, the Ranee's Power will cease silently and quietly,

the admission being recorded that the British Government, as guardian of the Boy administering the affairs of the State, is to *exercise all the functions and possess all the powers* of the Regent on behalf of the Prince (Singh 1940: 93).

This was accomplished by the Treaty of Bharowal. The Maharanee was pensioned off with an annual allowance of Rs 1.5 lakhs.

But the British political agents at Lahore were not fully satisfied. 'The Ranee', according to Herbert Edwardes, 'had more wit and daring than any man of her nation' (Bell: 13). According to *History of the Panjab* 1846, Vol. II, she was possessed of a wonderful ability 'to act with energy and spirit' and was well known as 'being skillful in the use of her pen, whereby, it is supposed, she was able to arrange and combine means of Hira Singh's overthrow' (ii: 311). As long as she was in Lahore, the British could not feel secure in their saddle in the Punjab, thought the British Resident. He, therefore, tried to 'give the dog a bad name and hang it'. She was advertised as implicated in everything anti-British in the country. She was said to be behind the Prema conspiracy for the murder of Sardar Tej Singh and the insurrection at Multan. But there was no proof, nor could any evidence be mustered against her. As such, no legal action could in either case be formed against her.

A strong pretence, however, came handy to the British Resident, Colonel Henry Lawrence, on 7 August 1847, when in the *darbar* held for the purpose of conferring titles and honours on those selected by the Resident, the young Maharaja Duleep Singh refused to anoint Sardar Tej Singh with the *tilak* of the title of Raja. The Maharaja could not have done this on his own initiative, argued the Resident. He construed it as an affront to the British government that had decided to create Tej Singh a Raja, in recognition for his services to them. But his loyalty to and complicity with the British in the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, when he was himself the commander-in-chief of the Sikh forces arrayed against the British, was, according to all interpretations of political morality, nothing short of treachery to the government of the Punjab whose trusted servant he was. And the Maharani could not have willingly allowed a traitor to be anointed by her own son whose cause he had so basely betrayed.

The Resident considered such an influence of the Maharani on her son as not conducive to the upbringing of the young Maharaja

and moulding his mind and character according to the future plans and designs of the British government who had decided upon the annexation of his country sooner or later. The Governor-General, therefore, readily agreed to the proposal of separating the mother from her son prior to her removal from Lahore and ultimate banishment from the country. To begin with, she was ordered to confine herself to the Samman Burj in the fort of Lahore from where she wrote the following letter to Henry Lawrence.

Robkar

From Bibi (Jind Kaur) Sahib to (Colonel) Lawrence,

I had entrusted my head to your care. You have thrust it under the feet of traitors. You have not done justice to me. You ought to have instituted an enquiry, and then charged me with what you found against me. You ought not to have acted upon what the traitors told you.

You have kept no regard of the friendship of the great Maharaja. You have caused me to be disgraced by other people. You have not even remained true to treaties and agreements. Raja Lal Singh was true and faithful to me. He was loyal. Having levelled charges against him, you sent him away. We thought that as the Sahib himself was with us, we had no fear from any one. We could never imagine that we will be put in prison with baseless charges concocted against us. Produce any writings of ours. Prove any charges against me. Then you could do anything you like.

Myself, the Maharaja and twenty-two maid-servants are imprisoned in the Samman (Burj). All other servants have been dismissed. We are in a very helpless condition. Even water and food are not allowed to come in. Now that you persecute us in this way, it is better that you hang us instead of it.

If you administer justice to us, well and good; otherwise I shall appeal to London headquarters. Even the allowance of one lakh and fifty thousand that had been fixed has not been paid by any body. The amount of fifty-one thousand that I had spent in four months, I have paid to Missar Meghraj after having sold my ornaments. I never begged for anything from anyone. Having sold my ornaments, I was managing to live on. Why should you have caused me to be disgraced without any fault? What was the fault of Manglan that she too has been turned out?

The Maharaja came to me today and wept bitterly for a long time. He said that Bishan Singh and Gulab Singh had been frightening him. If something happened to the Maharaja through fright, then what shall I do? He was told that orders of the Sahib for him were to reside in the Shalimar. He wept very bitterly when he heard this. The treatment that is thus meted out to us has not been given to any ruling house.

Why do you take possession of the kingdom by underhand means? Why don't you do it openly? On the one hand you make a show of friendship and on the other you have put us in prison. Do justice to me or I shall appeal to the London headquarters. Preserve three or four traitors, and put the whole of the Punjab to the sword at their bidding.

(SEAL)

Akal Sahai

Bibi Jind Kaur

The Resident, Henry Lawrence, ultimately prevailed upon the councillors of the state to agree to remove the Maharani to the fort of Sheikhpura for close imprisonment. In his letter of 9 August 1847, Sir Henry Lawrence had suggested to the Governor-General 'that Her Highness ought to be banished from the Punjab' (Secretary to the Governor-General to Resident at Lahore, 16 August 1847, Punjab Papers 1847-49: 47). The Governor-General suggested three places—Nurpur, Chamba and Kangra—in the British territories as the most suitable for the Maharani's residence.

On the morning of the 19 August 1847, the young Maharaja was sent away to the Shalimar Garden at a distance of about two miles from the palace in the fort and arrangements for the removal of the Maharani were taken into hand. The Resident expressed his decided opinion that the fort of Kangra (annexed to the British territories after the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46) was a better abode for the Maharani than the fort of Sheikhpura, 'but finding the chiefs decidedly averse to incur what they consider the odium of participating in effecting the banishment of the Maharani' (Resident at Lahore to the Secretary to Governor-General, 20 August 1847, Punjab Papers 1847-49: Enclosure 8 in No. 9, 51), he yielded the point and agreed to her imprisonment in the fort of Sheikhpura 'as the first step to the final banishment of Ranee Jhunda (*sic*. Jindan) from the country' (Governor-

General to the Secret Committee, Punjab Papers 1847-49: 143-44).

This decided, the Maharani was removed from Lahore between 8 and 9 pm under a strong military escort, accompanied by Sardars Arjan Singh, Rangharnanglia and Gurmukh Singh Lamma, and was lodged in Sheikhpura fort in the early hours of Friday, 20 August 1847, under the charge of Sardar Boor Singh.

In addition to this, the Maharani's annual allowance of Rs 1.5 lakhs, stipulated in Article 10 of the Treaty of Bharowal, was reduced by 69 per cent to Rs 4,000 per mensem (Governor-General to Secret Committee No. 50, 3 June 1848, Punjab Papers 1847-49: No. 27, 143).

Not long after her arrival at Sheikhpura, she wrote the following letter to the Resident at Lahore giving vent to indignation at being so ruthlessly separated from her young son who was still in his ninth year of age.

With the Grace of the Great Guru

From Bibi Sahib to Lawrence Sahib,

We have arrived safely at Sheikhpura. You should send our luggage with care. As I was sitting in the Samman, in the same way I am in Sheikhpura. Both the places are same to me. You have been very cruel to me. You have snatched my son from me. For ten months I kept him in my womb. Then I brought him up with great difficulty. Without any fault you have separated my son from me. You could have kept me in prison. You could have dismissed my men. You could have turned out my maid-servants. You could have treated me in any other way you liked. But you should not have separated my son from me.

In the name of the God you worship, and in the name of the king whose salt you eat, restore my son to me. I cannot bear the pain of this separation. Instead of this you put me to death.

My son is very young. He is incapable of doing anything. You want his kingdom. I have no need of kingdom. For God's sake, pay attention to my appeals. At this time I have no one to look to. I raise no objections. I will accept what you say. There is no one with my son. He has no sister, no brother. He has no uncle, senior or junior. His father he has lost. To whose care has he been entrusted? Without any fault why is so much cruelty being done to me?

I shall reside in Sheikhpura. I shall not go to Lahore. Send my son to me. I will come to you at Lahore only during the days

when you hold *darbar*. On that day I will send him. A great deal (of injustice) has been done to me. A great deal (of injustice) has been done to my son also. You have accepted what other people have said. Put an end to it now. Too much has been done.

In spite of all the efforts and camouflage by the British political agents and their native associates, the sadness of the Maharaja on account of his separation from his mother could not be completely hidden. And the officiating Resident, Mr John Lawrence², had to admit in his letter dated 23 August 1847, to the Secretary to the Governor-General that even on the evening of the third day (21 August 1847) of his mother's removal from Lahore, a 'slight shade of sadness' was visible on the face of the Maharaja. On his return to the palace in the fort, he gave up the old apartments where he had lived with his mother and shifted to the *takht-gah*.

The third letter of the Maharani was written on 16 *Bhadon* 1904 Bk. (30 August 1847), evidently in reply to a communication from Mr John Lawrence. It is not in the original language of the Maharani but is translated into Urdu (Persian script) and it bears the initials (J.L.) of John Lawrence at the lefthand bottom corner of the first page. At the end of the letter there is a foot-note in Persian saying, 'this is the translation of a *Hindvi* (Panjabi) letter that the Maharani had written in Gurmukhi script'.

With the Grace of the Great Guru

*From the Queen-mother to John Lawrence,
dated 16 Bhadon (30 August 1847)*

Your letter has been received. It is a matter of great pleasure that you remember me. I am very glad to learn from your letter that Maharaja is happy. Since the day I left Lahore, it is today that I have heard of the Maharaja being happy. Whatever you write may be true. But my mind does not believe that the Maharaja is happy. How can he, whose mother has been separated from him, be happy? You call him Maharaja and then treat him like this. On the one hand he is very young; on the other he had never been separated (from his mother). You are an intelligent and a wise man. Think over it in your mind how the Maharaja can be happy. You write to me that on account of friendship between the two Governments you are very particular of the welfare of the Maharaja. How far you look to the welfare of the

Maharaja is now well known all over the world. Weeping, he was torn away from his mother and taken to Shalimar Garden, while the mother was dragged out by her hair. Well has the friendship been repaid. You never thought in your mind how the Maharaja who was very young, could live (happily without his mother).

You had been kept for the protection of our honour and dignity. But the traitors have robbed us of these also. It is a matter of sorrow that you did not weigh things before accusing me. You have exiled me on the instigation of traitors. Whatever you have done has earned a good name for you! I have lost my dignity and you have lost regard for your word (*Meri izzat abru aur tumhara zana ka sukahn gaya*). The treatment that you have given to me is not given even to murderers. Having renounced everything, I had become a *faqir*, but you have not allowed me to live even like a *faqir*. I am very much hard up for money.

I have sent Bandujit to you. Keep him with you. Half of my luggage has been received by me. The other half, they do not give. Get that sent to me, and also get the allowance and have it sent to me.

To John Lawrence,
Superintendent and Commissioner, Jullundur Doab, and
Acting Resident, Lahore.

In this letter again she expresses her grief and indignation at being separated from her son and tells the British Resident, Mr John Lawrence, 'It is a matter of sorrow that you did not weigh things before accusing me. You have exiled me on the instigation of traitors.' She strongly resents the treatment given to her in Sheikhpura and says that such treatment 'is not given even to murderers'.

Finding herself helpless and seeing no prospect of either an enquiry into the allegations against her or of justice at the hands of the political agents in the Punjab, she sent an agent, Sardar Jiwan Singh, to represent her case to the Governor-General at Calcutta. He seems to have arrived there in December 1847 and submitted a representation to the Secretary to the Government of India on 2 January 1849, complaining of

the cruel and unworthy treatment under which she now suffers; to demand of British justice a full and impartial investigation of the charges (but imperfectly known even to herself) under which she

has, by British authority, been condemned to incarceration; and to request that the restraint to which she may be subjected pending that investigation, may be such as becomes the widow of one Sovereign Prince and the mother of another; such as is compatible with the safety of her person and such as will not deprive her of that intercourse with her friends and advisers which is necessary for bringing the truth of her cause to light (Punjab Papers 1847-49: Enclosure No. 2).

But the Governor-General declined to recognize him as her *vakil* and directed 'that all her communications must be made through the Resident'. This amounted to complete denial of justice to the Maharani, contended Sardar Jiwan Singh, and he appealed to the Secretary to the government of India on 23 February 1848, for modification of the Governor-General's resolution.

The confinement in which the Ranee is now kept, is of the most close and rigid description. She is shut up in the fort of Sheikhoopoor, formerly used as a goal for common felons, under the custody of those Sardars from whose dangerous machinations against her own life, and that of her son, she first solicited the protection of a British force stationed at Lahore—all intercourse with her friends and advisers, or even with the ministers of her religion, is strictly prohibited, and the only attendants allowed her are a few female servants, not of her own selection, but appointed by her keepers. So penal is the nature of the treatment she undergoes, that she is not allowed even the privilege of choosing her own diet.

The friends of the Ranee now in Lahore, are so much intimidated that they do not call the attention of the Resident to the hardships which she suffers.

And, on the same behalf, I further request that the Resident at Lahore be directed to institute an investigation into the charges under which the Ranee has been imprisoned, and to take down, and transmit to his Lordship in Council, the evidence of all witnesses which may be produced, in support, or in rebuttal, of the accusation. His Lordship, in directing such investigation, will, no doubt, order that, under all precautions which may appear to him prudent, or necessary to prevent an abuse of the privileges, the Ranee shall be allowed such intercourse with her friends and advisers as will enable her to plead her cause effectually'. (Jeeban Singh to the Secretary to

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the Government of India, Calcutta, 23 February 1848, Punjab Papers 1847-49: No. 22, Enclosure No. 5, 108)

But all this was to no avail. The government did not find it safe, for political reasons, to institute an enquiry, because in the absence of any proof of her delinquency, she might have been acquitted. And this would have exposed the intentions of the British and upset their plans about the Punjab. As early as the 9 August 1847, the Resident at Lahore when recommending 'her expulsion from the Panjab for ever', had written to the Secretary with the Governor-General, 'I do not disguise from myself, nor do I wish the Governor-General to be ignorant of the fact, that *the Maharanee is the only effective enemy to our policy that I know of in the country*' (Punjab Papers 1847-49: No. 9, Enclosure 2, 39).

To add to her misfortunes came the Multan rebellion which began with an attack on P.A. Vans Agnew and Lieutenant William Anderson at Multan on 19 April 1848. There again the hidden hand of the Maharani, closely imprisoned in the fort of Sheikhpura, was said to have been working, although there was nothing to prove it. '*There is no proof*', wrote the Resident to the Secretary to the government of India on 16 May 1848,

though there is some ground for suspicion that the Maharanee was the instigator of the late violence in Mooltan; but it is certain that, at this moment, the eyes of Diwan Moolraj, of the whole Sikh army and military population are directed to the Maharanee as the rallying point of their rebellion or disaffection. Her removal from the Panjab is called for by justice, and policy, and there is no time for us to hesitate about doing what may appear necessary to punish State offenders, whatever may be their rank and station, and to vindicate the honour and position of the British Government. (Punjab Papers 1847-49: No. 37, Enclosure No. 24, 168)

It is difficult for a student of history to accept things done on mere suspicion as 'called for by justice' and to call a person a 'State offender' when 'there is no proof' of his or her offence. However, the Maharani was removed from the fort of Sheikhpura on the afternoon of 15 May 1848, to spend the remainder of her life in exile away from the land of her birth and the kingdom of her son—the Punjab—that was taken possession of by the British within ten months.

The Maharani's banishment from the Panjab created a stir amongst the Sikhs and a general demand for her restoration was made everywhere. But the Governor-General had already made up his plans and was determined on the annexation of the Panjab. He therefore refused to entertain any suggestion that stood in the way of removing the last independent kingdom from the northwest frontier of India that he wished to extend to the borders of Afghanistan. The restoration of the Maharani was, for political reasons, therefore, out of question. And, Lord Dalhousie wrote the following letter to Brigadier Mountain. The letter is self-explanatory:

Private
Camp Ferozepore,
31 January 1849

My dear Mountain,
The pretences of the Sikhs of their anxiety to get back the Ranee . . . are preposterous. And the more sincere they are, the stronger are the grounds for not acceding to them. She has the only manly understanding in the Panjab; and her restoration would furnish the only thing which is wanting to render the present movement (the so-called Second Sikh War) truly formidable, namely an object and a head.

Notes

¹ Tej Singh was a nephew of Jemadar Khushal Singh, a Gour brahmin of Ikri in Sardhana Pargannah of Meerut District in the Uttar Pradesh (Griffin 1865: 29).

² Henry Lawrence left Lahore for England on 21 August 1847, and made over the charge of the British Residency to his brother, John Lawrence.

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Evidence for Sixteenth-Century Agrarian Conditions in the Guru Granth Sahib

Irfan Habib

The literature created in the local dialects by the religious teachers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries should be of special interest to students of medieval social history. A large number of these teachers, headed by Kabir, not only spoke in the dialects of the people, but themselves belonged to the lowest classes. We could expect that in their compositions, more than anywhere else, we should be able to find authentic allusions to the social environment amidst which the mass of the people lived. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be sure that what passes today in the name of these teachers is their own, authentic voice. It is, for example, well recognized that the *bijak* and large numbers of verses popularly ascribed to Kabir are later compositions. We, therefore, need specially to be grateful for the fact that the Guru Granth Sahib, whose compilation was definitely concluded in 1604 by Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, not only contains the verses of Nanak and his spiritual successors, but also preserves in their original linguistic garb a number of compositions ascribed to Kabir, Ravidas, and other like-minded teachers. Even if we cannot claim that we have here the absolutely authentic Kabir, we certainly have here the earliest existing version of verses current in his name, a version that was given shape within the sixteenth century during which Kabir himself lived.¹ It, of course, goes without saying that the verses of the Sikh Gurus themselves are, but for the possibility of human error in compilation and transcription, practically genuine. All of these too, except for some verses of the ninth Guru inserted later, were composed in the sixteenth century.²

In the present paper an attempt is made to show how in a specific field, namely, agrarian history, certain verses of Kabir and Arjan, contained in the Granth Sahib, offer evidence of great interest.